

Attitudes towards PrEP among MSM in London & the Midlands

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Contextualising PrEP in the UK

- 101,200 people estimated to be living with HIV in UK. Just under half are MSM.
- Current HIV prevention methods
 - Condom use
 - Serosorting, “strategic positioning”
 - Treatment as prevention (TasP)
- PrEP – a promising biomedical intervention for preventing HIV infection
 - iPrEP, Partners, PROUD clinical trials
- Truvada and Tenvir-EM (generic PrEP)
- NHS England announced the PrEP Impact Trial in December with a view to beginning in summer of 2017

Perceived disadvantages of PrEP

- Could lead to perceived invincibility & thus decreased condom use
- Exposure to other STIs amid growing awareness of antibiotic resistance
- Adherence to PrEP might not be adequate
- Adverse side effects in the long term
 - Adverse effect on renal function
 - Tenofovir disoproxil fumarate associated with bone density reduction
- Possible development of drug resistance to key anti-HIV agents
- Effectiveness of PrEP if exposed to resistant HIV
- Costs associated with rolling out PrEP

Media representations of PrEP

We conducted a qualitative content analysis* of UK press coverage of PrEP (from 2008 until 2015) in newspapers, including *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian* and *The Independent*

Represented as

- a positive development in the “battle” against HIV (the *hope* representation) & positioned as superior to existing prevention methods
- ‘weapon’, ‘battle’, ‘arsenal of weapons’, ‘wonder drug’ vs ‘besieged HIV’
- linked to vaccination

- a medical, social and psychological setback in this “battle”, particularly for gay/bisexual men (the *risk* representation)
- focus on risks, uncertainties and PrEP as a hazard - ‘pop a pill’, ‘party drug’, ‘reckless’, ‘recreational sex’
- negative reporting emphasises stigma surrounding gay/ bisexual men

*Jaspal, R. & Nerlich, B. (2016) Polarised Reporting about HIV Prevention: Social Representations of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) in the UK Press. *Health: An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Social Study of Health, Illness and Medicine* DOI: 10.1177/1363459316649763

Acceptability of PrEP among UK MSM

- Frankis et al. (2016) conducted a survey study of PrEP acceptability among UK-based MSM at high risk of HIV infection
- One third (34.5%) of MSM had heard of PrEP, with awareness related to living in large cities, degree level education, commercial gay scene use and reporting an HIV test in the last year.
- Over half of participants (58.5%) reported willingness to use PrEP if it were available but there was no relationship between PrEP acceptability and previous PrEP awareness.
- Being a younger men (18–25 years), testing every 6 months, and reporting 5+ UAI partners were associated with willingness to use PrEP
- Need for qualitative insights from both HIV- & HIV+ MSM

Qualitative study of MSM's attitudes

We conducted a thematic analysis study* of HIV- and HIV+ MSM's attitudes towards PrEP

Research questions

- How are PrEP and its functions described?
 - What do MSM think about PrEP?
 - What role do they feel it could play in their lives?
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- 3 focus groups with 16 HIV- MSM
 - Individual interviews with 11 HIV- MSM
 - 3 focus groups with 14 HIV+ MSM
 - Individual interviews with 9 HIV+ MSM
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- Ethnically diverse and aged between 25-48

*Jaspal, R. & Daramilas, C. (2016). Perceptions of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) among HIV-negative and HIV-positive men who have sex with men. *Cogent Medicine*, 3: 1256850.

Qualitative data from HIV- MSM

Uncertainty and fear

- *Well, they say it's effective but it isn't exactly a vaccine is it? Scientists can make mistakes too.. With a condom you put it on and that's it. You know what the score is.*
- *It freaks me out, taking those pills and you don't know the effects they will have. I do look after myself and my body and skin. All of that matters to me.*

Managing relations with others

- *I often wonder how people would judge me for taking PrEP.*
- *I'd have to hide the pills because people would think I'm positive.*

Stigma and categorisation

- *It wouldn't benefit me. I don't take many risks, not much more than guys on the scene. I suppose it's for someone high-risk.*
- *I read an article that said 'Truvada Whore".. It must be because this pill lets you have sex with condoms with loads of guys*

Generally, the concept of PrEP interested HIV- MSM but they manifested little interest in personal use of PrEP

Qualitative data from HIV+ MSM

Decreased uncertainty and fear about sex

- *When I was diagnosed, I felt terrible... I felt like a monster, that I was going to infect everyone. I was quite afraid.. PrEP would give me more confidence and give my partners more security*

Managing relations with others

- *At the moment, it is difficult for me to imagine myself with a negative partner*
- *I think PrEP could take away with barrier that exists between positive and negative guys*

Stigma and categorisation

- *In my generation and in my culture it was different. You didn't talk about safer sex, or protection or anything, but now young guys are just being really risky. I think PrEP will increase this.*

Generally, they considered PrEP a beneficial development that could promote positive change (socially & psychologically)

Attitudes towards PrEP among MSM

The future of PrEP: some conclusions

- The UK press focuses on two contradictory social representations
 - PrEP as a wonder drug vs party drug
- These representations are also echoed in the interviews with MSM
 - Some acknowledge public health benefits but resist personal benefits
 - Resisting social stigma & harnessing positive self-presentation
- Prevention tool but also a tool for challenging social isolation of HIV+ MSM
- Stigma could be a barrier to accessing PrEP among those who might benefit
- Need more discussion of PrEP as an element of HIV prevention
- More awareness and understanding of PrEP is necessary
- Need to challenge social stigma of PrEP (in addition to HIV stigma)